

Tribe Pushes For End To Land Negotiations

AKWESASNE — The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe is continuing its public relations effort to push the Franklin County Board of Legislators toward a conclusion of land claim negotiations.

The tribe on Thursday issued a press release reiterating earlier news that the tribe, New York state and St. Lawrence County had signed a Memorandum of Understanding on May 28 to “resolve the decades-old boundary issue that impedes both land ownership and jurisdictional issues.” They also announced the St. Lawrence County Legislature’s recent resolution authorizing Chairman Jonathan Putney to eventually sign the formalized land claim.

But the release immediately goes on to state the tribe’s eagerness that Franklin County quickly follow suit. In order for the settlement to move forward, Franklin County officials would also have to agree to its terms.

“Tribal Council commends the St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators resolution to authorize the Chair of the Board, Jonathan Putney, to sign, upon final settlement agreement,” stated Chief Ron LaFrance. “We’re confident Franklin County, too, will negotiate similar terms with the State.”

Later in the release, Chief Beverly Cook reinforces the message.

“The Tribe is aware that resolving our long-standing

boundary issues will impact our neighbors, but the benefits are significant to both Akwesasne and our surrounding counties. We want a resolution that provides our Tribe the opportunity to return land to our territory and access to higher education by enacting a waiver of tuition and mandatory fees at all SUNY schools. St. Lawrence County worked in a collaborative fashion. It is our hope that Franklin County will do the same,” Ms. Cook said.

Franklin County Legislature Chairman Billy Jones had no comment on the tribe’s release, saying only that negotiations are “ongoing.”

The release is another public relations effort by the tribe in an effort to get Franklin

County moving toward their own MOU with the tribe and state.

In July, the tribe sent out postcards to Franklin County residents to alert them to a website that contains information about the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed with St. Lawrence County.

“To learn more about how the proposed settlement agreement benefits Franklin County, please visit www.ResolveTheBoundary.com,” read the card, which proclaimed itself an “important notice for all residents of Franklin County.”

The tribe is seeking roughly 9,900 acres in Franklin County in the area known as the Bom-

bay Triangle and in the town of Fort Covington.

The tribe has sought return of the lands, reserved within a 1796 treaty, since what they deemed the unlawful sale of lands to the state more than 30 years ago. Due to the violation of the 1790 Non-Intercourse Act, the release states, the Mohawks have been able to file a land claim to revisit these losses.

Attempts to settle the land claims date back to 1978 when the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne filed the first federal complaint based on what the tribe said was the illegal purchases of 1796 treaty land and islands in the St. Lawrence River in 1882, according to the release. The tribe and the Mo-

hawk Nation Council of Chiefs filed suit in 1989. The negotiations have included former New York Govs. George Pataki and Eliot Spitzer and now the current governor, Andrew Cuomo. In 2005, an agreement that nearly settled the issue collapsed.

“The MOU has deliberately been negotiated with intentions of protecting landowners and local governments,” the tribe’s release states. “The land claim and its interpretation of terms outlined in the MOU are complex, but the intended result is to bring clarity and certainty to the boundary, and to end the dispute in a way that is mutually beneficial, addressing all parties concerns,” according to the release.